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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the activities and outcomes of a project designed to provide training and technical assistance to families and professionals working with children and youth with severe disabilities in developing and implementing effective educational programs in school and community environments. The project was implemented in collaboration with family support groups, advocacy agencies, state agencies, local education agencies, colleges, and universities throughout the state of Oklahoma. The project focused on systemic change through the following areas of impact: increasing the number of students with severe disabilities who were taught in age-appropriate settings with typical peers; providing training and technical assistance to facilitate staff development and school reform; providing family training and support; and utilizing collaborative efforts to plan, implement, and evaluate effective educational programs in the least restrictive environment for children and youth with severe disabilities. During the 6 years of implementation, 19 schools districts and 1 cooperative became partnership sites within the state. Within these sites, 2,711 students with severe disabilities were directly impacted by the project, 4,531 certified staff received intensive training, and 607 families attended training or parent meetings. This report also discusses the accomplishments of the projects, problems encountered and solved, and recommendations. (CR)

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Sandy Garrett
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

OKLAHOMA STATEWIDE SYSTEMS CHANGE PROJECT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

FINAL REPORT

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Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project

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Executive Summary

Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project

Kathy Stephens, M.S.
Project Coordinator

The **Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project** was designed to provide training and technical assistance to families of, and professionals working with children and youth with severe disabilities in developing and implementing effective educational programs in school and community environments. This training and technical assistance project was implemented in collaboration with family support groups, advocacy agencies, state agencies, local education agencies, colleges, and universities throughout the state of Oklahoma.

The goals of the project focused on systemic change through the following areas of impact: increase the number of students with severe disabilities who are taught in age-appropriate settings alongside their peers without disabilities; provide training and technical assistance to facilitate staff development and school reform; provide family training and support; and utilize collaborative efforts to plan, implement, and evaluate effective educational programs in the least restrictive environment for children and youth with severe disabilities.

The Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project was federally funded from October 1993 through September 1998. A no-cost time extension was allowed from October 1998 through December 1999. During the six years of implementation, 19 school districts and 1 Cooperative became partnership sites within the state. Within these sites 2,711 students with severe disabilities were directly impacted by the project, 4,531 certified staff received intensive training, and 607 families attended trainings or parent meetings. Project staff assisted with the development and implementation of district level management teams to support inclusive education. The purpose of the

management teams was to support individual building efforts in implementing inclusive education as well as guiding the development of overall district policy.

Project staff presented at 14 national meetings, 75 state conferences, 26 regional conferences, 203 school district (nonpartnership sites) staff development inservices, 42 family trainings, and 22 guest lectures for special and regular education majors at 10 universities throughout the state. Project staff also served on a variety of local, state and national advisory boards and councils, including IDEA-Part B, Interagency Coordinating Council for Special Services, Transition, University Affiliated Program, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, System of Care, Children's Mental Health Coalition, and Oklahoma Genetics. The staff also participated in Paraprofessional and Teacher Registry Training activities.

The Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project provided five summer institutes for partnership districts, co-sponsored 120 conferences regionally and statewide, and assisted in bringing 29 nationally recognized educational experts to Oklahoma for workshops and trainings.

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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project (OSSCP) utilized a collaborative model of management to oversee the project in completing the activities of the grant. Project staff were under the direct supervision of the Project Coordinator and administration of Special Education Services of the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE).

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Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project

Goals:

1. Build the capacity at the state, regional, and local levels to support the education of children and youth with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

2. Expand collaborative efforts to plan, implement, and evaluate educational programs in the least restrictive environment for children and youth with severe disabilities.

3. Improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of instruction delivered to children and youth with severe disabilities in general education and community environments.

4. Increase the ability of educational personnel to meet the presenting needs of children and youth with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

BACKGROUND:

In 1993 when the Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project was funded, Oklahoma ranked 27 in the nation in population. Oklahoma is a rural state with 544 school districts (there were 563 at the beginning of the project) located within its 77 counties. Of the 69,797 students served in special education during the 1991-92 school year, 3,282 were students with severe disabilities. Oklahoma schools were struggling with understanding and providing inclusive educational opportunities for their students with severe disabilities. Many students were being served in self-contained classrooms with little interaction with nondisabled peers. Few training opportunities for teachers, administrators, and parents concerning effective inclusive educational practices had occurred. The term "inclusive education" was hardly being used, and few knew what to do to be inclusive. Although some districts were attempting to begin inclusive practices, these were usually building site or child specific and not readily available for other students with severe disabilities within the district. "Pockets" of change were occurring, but systemic change was still only a vision. An overall goal of the project was to help districts provide inclusive educational practices for their students while making systemic changes that would continue these practices for future students districtwide.

The following vision statement was adopted by Special Education Services, Oklahoma State Department of Education in January 1995:

> *"The Oklahoma vision is for children, youth, families, professionals, and communities to work together to create an accepting, respectful, and accessible environment for all community members and all individuals working with children and youth will collaborate to assure family involvement, provide smooth transitions at all stages of the educational process, and ensure that all children and youth are successfully prepared for participation in the community."*

This vision statement was developed through a statewide collaborative effort with educators, parents, project staff and Special Education Services staff.

Throughout the grant, project staff worked very hard to support districts through the change process and implementation of inclusive practices. Districts received assistance to include their students with severe disabilities into regular education classes with the appropriate and needed supports. Supporting special and regular education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers through training, technical assistance, resources, and materials was a high priority of project staff. In every activity the project emphasized the ultimate goal of enhancing and improving educational opportunities for Oklahoma's students with severe disabilities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Goal 1:
Build the capacity at the state, regional, and local levels to support the education of children and youth with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Objective 1.1:

> Assist family members, general and special education instructional team members, and administrative personnel throughout the state of Oklahoma in the creation of a vision for inclusive education.

An awareness presentation on inclusive education was developed by project staff. The presentation was designed to provide participants with an overview of inclusive education in Oklahoma, the underlying assumptions associated with inclusive education, myths and truths of inclusion, potential challenges, and solutions to implementing inclusive education for students with severe disabilities.

The dissemination of information related to effective inclusive education for children and youth with severe disabilities was a very important part of the project's activities. Project materials were distributed at conferences, meetings, through mailings to partnership districts, and individually as requested. Presentations by project staff included 14 national conferences, 75 state conferences, 26 regional conferences, 203 school districts (nonpartnership sites) staff development inservices, 32 family trainings, and 22 guest lectures for education majors at 10 universities within Oklahoma. Paraprofessional Training and Teacher Registry Training were other opportunities for project staff to assist school personnel in learning more about inclusive practices for students with severe disabilities.

Objective 1.2:

> Build the capacity of state level agencies to collaboratively support inclusive education programs.

The project coordinator was a member of the Interagency Coordinating Council for Special Services through the Oklahoma Commission on Children & Youth. This council addressed coordination of services and service delivery system for children and youth with special needs. The council provided an opportunity to include effective inclusive educational practices into discussion and recommendations to state level agencies.

Project staff also participated in several state level advisory boards and task forces including: IDEA-B State Advisory Panel, Transition, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), System of Care, Childrens' Mental Health Coalition, and Oklahoma Genetics Advisory Council. These activities provided opportunities for staff to encourage collaboration among agencies to support effective inclusive education.

The project coordinator also served as a member of the University Affiliated Program Policy Coordinating Council which addressed developing projects and activities that help people with disabilities and their families.

Objective 1.3:

> Build the capacity of regional programs to support inclusive educational programs in school districts throughout Oklahoma.

The Family Outreach Specialist served as an advisor to the eleven Regional Advisory Boards through the Oklahoma Commission on Children & Youth. The Regional Advisory Boards were designed to support interagency resources for coordination of services for children and youth with special needs. Regional boards worked with partnership districts to address barriers to inclusive education within their regional area.

Oklahoma's Regional Educational Service Center (RESC) personnel participated in training activities sponsored by this project in their regions. RESC personnel worked with partnership districts as district team members implementing appropriate education for children and youth with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

University Affiliated Program (UAP) partners were invited to participate in project sponsored training activities. Project staff presented on topics related to family issues and strategies for supporting children and youth with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment at quarterly teacher registry trainings (32 hours of intensive training for an endorsement that allows individuals to teach children and youth with severe disabilities) sponsored by the UAP. Project staff collaborated with the UAP to develop and implement Training Oklahoma Providers of Service (TOPS) as a cross-disciplinary field experience model. TOPS began implementation at Western Heights Public School System (a partnership district) with project staff participating in field-based seminars.

Project staff worked with the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Regional Teams to provide regional activities for teachers, administrators, other service providers, and parents that support effective inclusive practices.

Training materials, fact sheets, videos, and resources related to inclusive education were provided to regional Family Resource Centers to be available for professionals and parents within their communities.

Objective 1.4:

> Build the capacity of local education agencies to implement and refine inclusive educational services for students with severe disabilities.

Project staff assisted with the development and implementation of district level management teams to support inclusive education in partnership districts. The purpose of the management teams was to support individual building level efforts in implementing inclusive education, as well as guiding the development of overall district policy. Project staff worked with partnership districts to advocate for the development, adoption, and implementation of district policies for supporting the education of children and youth with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Partnership districts were established in 20 locations throughout the state. Please refer to Map #1 and District Demographics Table #1.

Objective 1.5:

> Build the capacity of individual school campuses to support inclusive education efforts.

Training and needs assessments were completed by building level teams to determine training, materials, and technical assistance needs. IEPs were reviewed to examine existing practices and to recommend additional opportunities for inclusive practices for individual students. Project staff provided training and technical assistance as requested by individual sites. Partnership districts received a variety of materials and resources to support inclusive educational practices. A process guide that provided information related to the key issues of design, implementation, and evaluation of appropriate education in the least restrictive environment was developed and disseminated to partnership districts.

Objective 1.6:

> Build the capacity of instructional teams to support individual students with severe disabilities in inclusive educational programs.

A process guide for the design and implementation of student support strategies was developed and disseminated to assist instructional teams. Project staff were available to partnership districts to assist instructional teams through trainings, technical assistance, family meetings, and resource materials.

Goal 2:

Expand collaborative efforts to plan, implement, and evaluate educational programs in the least restrictive environment for children and youth with severe disabilities.

Objective 2.1:

> Empower families and consumers to participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive educational programs.

One of the strengths of this project was having a family member on staff as the Family Outreach Specialist. This enabled the project to have a family focus within all activities and materials developed. Family members identified with this staff person as someone who had experienced similar experiences because the Family Outreach Specialist was a parent of a child with severe disabilities. The Family Outreach Specialist presented to family members, special education and regular education teachers, administrators, undergraduate educational and related service majors, and community members on topics concerning family issues, parent/professional collaboration, and effective inclusive educational practices.

The Family Outreach Specialist served as project liaison for the 11 Regional Advisory Boards through the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, Interagency Coordinating Council for Special Services. This involved providing parent technical assistance to regional board activities and assisting in developing and sustaining Family Perspective Regional Conferences throughout the state.

The Family Outreach Specialist developed the process guide Conference and Workshop Planning Guide for Regional Advisory Boards for Special Services to Children and Youth to assist parent regional advisory co-chairs in planning for regional Family Perspective Conferences. This process guide assisted family members, professionals, and community members with collaborative strategies for organizing informational workshops and conferences and participating as equal decision makers in the implementation of effective education programs in integrated school and community environments.

The Family Outreach Specialist also developed a guide to promote effective collaboration between school personnel and parents of children with severe disabilities. The components of the guide included: enhancing parent/professional collaboration; communicating effectively with parents; people first language; involving parents as decision makers; helping parents become advocates; and preparing parents for IEP meetings. This guide was distributed to partnership districts to be utilized during staff development and inservice activities to enable school personnel to more effectively work with parents and family members.

Family members in each partnership district were identified to participate on building site teams. They also reviewed project materials to ensure that materials were sensitive to family needs and reflected family perspectives. Family members met with the Family Outreach Specialist for trainings concerning IEPs, effective communication, parents as advocates, empowerment through active involvement, and collaboration with school and other agency personnel.

Family members were encouraged to participate in all project sponsored training activities and relevant meetings. They were also encouraged to participate in technical assistance activities when appropriate.

Objective 2.2:

> Promote collaborative decision making among key agencies to implement inclusive educational programs.

A collaborative decision making process was utilized in all state, regional, campus, and student team meetings sponsored by the project. This process was used to identify issues (problems) related to inclusive education that needed to be addressed and to generate strategies for solving identified problems. This process was also used at the summer institutes for partnership districts to identify common barriers across the state and to strategize for overcoming the identified barriers. Partnership districts held regularly scheduled meetings to identify barriers within their school systems that impeded the implementation of inclusive educational programs for students with severe disabilities either collectively or individually. Partnership districts evaluated

ways to implement program changes by building site and districtwide to maintain consistency and promote systemic change.

A process guide was developed to assist teams (e.g., student teams, building level teams, district teams) in making programmatic decisions. This guide was distributed to partnership districts. Project staff worked with various work teams to ensure that collaborative decision-making strategies were included in all relevant policies and procedures which resulted in the partnership sites.

Objective 2.3:

> Promote the use of a transdisciplinary model in the design, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive programs in all partnership district sites sponsored by the project.

A transdisciplinary model was utilized in the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective education programs in the partnership districts. The training and technical assistance process utilized procedures outlined in the School and Community Intergration Project Curriculum and IEP Process (1994).

A process guide on the use of a transdisciplinary team approach to inclusive education was developed by project staff. The guide was composed of the key elements identified from Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children: A Guide to Planning Inclusive Education (1993), The Syracuse Curriculum Revision Manual (1989), and Team Building Strategies (1993). This guide was distributed to partnership sites with training for district teams in implementation. We also encouraged the inclusion of transdisciplinary team models of educational service delivery in all relevant policies and procedures at the state, regional, and local levels.

Goal 3:

Improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of instruction delivered to children and youth with severe disabilities in general education and community environments.

Objective 3.1:

> Develop effective and replicable strategies for transitioning students from segregated to integrated settings without long term disruption to their educational process.

Effective strategies for transitioning students from segregated to integrated school and community environments were identified and incorporated into training and staff development activities. A "menu" of transition strategies was developed to assist districts in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of movement of their students from segregated settings to integrated settings. A process guide with the essential elements of planning for transition and for supporting families, students and professionals was developed and distributed to partnership and other districts.

Project staff assisted partnership districts that had students with severe disabilities who were being educated in segregated/self-contained settings to implement a process for transitioning students into a less restrictive educational environment. This was a key component of ongoing training and technical assistance activities in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa Public School systems. These two districts had large numbers of students in segregated settings as they became partnership districts. All students were transitioned into general education settings for at least part of their school day, with many students spending more time in general education settings than special education settings. Families were highly involved with transition planning and implementation activities to ensure that family outcomes for their children were heeded.

Project staff collaborated with the OSDE Special Education Services to assist Pauls Valley Public Schools in transitioning 42 school aged students from an institution (Southern Oklahoma Resource Center) to the public school setting. Specific activities included: (1) assisting in developing and implementing a Pauls Valley High School student support team, (2) presenting an "awareness" and orientation workshop for family members, professionals, and community members, (3) assisting with training in strategies for

transdisiplinary team development and implementation of IEPs to support students in general education settings, and (4) on-site technical assistance support. Pauls Valley Public Schools had 138 certified staff that attended trainings and participated in building level teams. Included in these teams were building level and districtwide administrators.

Objective 3.2:

> Establish inclusive education demonstration sites throughout the state of Oklahoma.

Each year letters were sent out from project staff to all school districts within the state describing the grant and what was expected of partnership (demonstration) districts. Districts were not given financial incentive to be a partnership district; however, they were given intensive training, technical assistance, parent meetings, and opportunities to participate in statewide and national conferences concerning effective educational practices for students with severe disabilities. Each partnership district had a minimum of three building level teams (elementary, middle, and high school) and a districtwide team (members of building level teams and administrators). Having teams at these three levels allowed for and encouraged systemic change within the district, rather than pockets of change. Building level teams consisted of regular and special education teachers, parents, related service providers, and building principal. Teams were required to meet monthly to assess progress and review obstacles. Project staff attended team meetings to provide support and direction during the first year a district became a partnership site. Staff development, workshop trainings, and parent meetings were intensive beginning with awareness of IDEA and least restrictive environment and continuing through modifications, adaptations, multiple intelligence, and many other topics.

Intensive planning and implementation for change occurred at all partnership sites. Building level teams participated in summer institutes to identify and work through barriers to change, develop a shared vision, and establish timelines for activities that would allow the improvement in student outcomes and family satisfaction.

After a district had completed their first year as a partnership site, technical assistance was provided when requested by the site. Technical assistance included one-on-one with regular and special educators for a specific child, assisting with IEP development, family meetings, working with related service providers for specific students, and/or assisting administrators to implement policy changes.

Partnership districts presented at regional, state, and national conferences and had visitations from other district personnel to be able to view innovative and effective educational opportunities for students with severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment in operation.

Within Oklahoma, partnership sites were established in 19 school districts and 1 cooperative (serving 10 school districts). (See Map #1 for location of districts.) Within these 19 partnership sites, 2,711 students with severe disabilities were directly impacted by the project, 4,531 certified staff received intensive training, and 607 families attended trainings or parent meetings. Community members were encouraged to participate in district level teams and be part of the change process for the school districts.

Objective 3.3:

> Identify and implement effective and replicable strategies which increase the number and quality of meaningful interactions between students with severe disabilities and typical peers.

A resource file with strategies for promoting positive social interactions and/or friendships between individuals with and without disabilities was developed. From this resource file, a training module was developed that provided specific strategies for promoting opportunities for peer interactions and the development of natural supports in school and community settings. The training module was used in partnership districts for districtwide workshops and with groups of teachers at individual building sites. Partnership districts were encouraged to develop peer mentoring or peer buddy programs to facilitate increased opportunities for students with severe disabilities to interact with their nondisabled peers. Many success stories came out of the peer mentoring and peer buddy programs. Teachers and families were encouraged to share

these stories at workshops, conferences, and team meetings of friendships between students developing because of these programs.

Objective 3.4:

> Promote use of student outcomes to determine program effectiveness.

Generic student outcomes were identified and utilized to guide the individualized educational programming for each student at partnership districts. These outcomes included: amount of time in general education classrooms, progress toward IEP goals and objectives, amount of time in instruction, amount of time in extracurricular activities, and family and student satisfaction surveys. A transdisciplinary process was utilized to identify the student outcomes to ensure that the outcomes did not just reflect the perspective of instructional personnel. Partnership districts used student outcomes as an ongoing evaluation process to determine the effectiveness of their inclusive educational programming.

Goal 4:

Increase the ability of educational personnel to meet the presenting needs of children and youth with severe disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment.

Objective 4.1:

> Design and implement models of preservice training which increases the number of personnel who can implement effective inclusive education programs.

Project staff planned and hosted a retreat for representatives from institutes of higher education involved in the preparation of personnel to serve students with severe disabilities. Materials used by nationally recognized programs in the preparation of preservice personnel were used as resources as part of the basis for discussion during the retreat. From this retreat, a work team was organized to address the identified issues. Members of the work team were selected to represent general and special education, related services, and family members. A position paper, "Preparation of Personnel to Serve Students with Severe Disabilities in Oklahoma," concerning the restructuring of preservice training and certification was developed.

Project staff participated in the development and implementation of the project, Training Oklahoma Providers of Service (TOPS) to address preservice training strategies. Valerie Williams, UAP (Collaborative Management Team) coordinated this activity with the Oklahoma Higher Education Special Education Consortium, the Oklahoma Commission on Teacher Preparation, and the UAP partner universities. This was a collaborative effort between the UAP of Oklahoma, the OU Health Sciences Center, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special Education Services, OSSCP, and Western Heights Public Schools (an OSSCP partnership district).

Project staff also served on the Supporting Change and Reform in Interprofessional Preservice Training (SCRIPT) Team. This project was an innovative inservice model for facilitating preservice improvements as a collaborative effort for interdisciplinary course work and practical aspects for preservice training.

Grant staff guest lectured in special education and general education preservice classes at Oklahoma State University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Tulsa, Northeastern Oklahoma University, Oral Roberts University, Oklahoma State University at Tulsa, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Cameron University, and University of Oklahoma. (See Map #2 for university locations.) These lectures included inclusive educational practices, working effectively with families, and teaming approaches to providing educational opportunities in the least restrictive environment.

Objective 4.2:

> Design and implement models of inservice training which build the capacity of existing personnel to implement effective inclusive education programs.

An inservice training program which assisted professionals and family members in creating a vision for inclusive education in their home communities was developed and implemented by project staff. This training was designed to enable school districts to develop an awareness and understanding of what education in the least restrictive environment was and was not. The program components included the following: (1) a description of the differences between inclusive education, integration, and mainstreaming, (2) a listing of the key issues associated with establishing and maintaining inclusive education programs, (3) definitions of the roles of family members and professionals, (4) a description of the key benefits for students with and without disabilities, and (5) examples of inclusive programs and participating students throughout Oklahoma.

Project staff established a process for identifying sites to serve as visitation programs, developed a directory of sites which identified key demographic variables (geographic location, age group of campus, specific disabilities, etc.), developed an observation guide for team participants to provide structure to the site visits, and established a process for site visits (scheduling, facilitation, debriefing, etc). Partnership districts sponsored visitations to their programs throughout the course of the grant. Partnership districts also presented at Family Perspective Conferences to parents and professionals demonstrating effective practices for serving students with severe

disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Partnership districts also presented at statewide and national conferences.

An inservice training series was developed to assist building teams in partnership districts to establish inclusive education programs for students with severe disabilities. The key components of the training were: (1) leadership for change strategies, (2) collaborative, transdisciplinary team development, (3) IEP development to support students in the least restrictive environment, (4) student support strategies, (5) curriculum restructuring, (6) management of general classroom operations, and (7) parent issues. Summer institutes served as intensive training opportunities for families and professionals involved in inclusive education programs for students with severe disabilities. Training for partnership districts also focused on developing a district level team, vision building, staff development, and family involvement. Training modules were developed by project staff and utilized for team training activities for individual building sites as well as districtwide training activities.

Another inservice training series which assisted local teams in refining inclusive educational programs already in operation was developed and used with partnership districts. This training focused on: (1) strategies for supporting students in general education and community environments, (2) providing opportunities for development of social relationships between students with and without disabilities, (3) developing collaborative relationships between family members and professionals, and (4) diversity within the classroom.

A written needs assessment was conducted at all project sponsored presentations and training activities. This information was summarized and utilized by project staff when scheduling training activities and/or presentations throughout the state so that staff addressed identified and prioritized needs. Training was provided to partnership districts first and then to other school districts as project staff time and resources were available.

Staff development, trainings, technical assistance, IEP assistance, and/or parent meetings occurred in 203 school districts throughout Oklahoma. These districts were within 52 of the 77 counties in Oklahoma. (See Map #3)

Objective 4.3:

> Expand technical assistance efforts to support inclusive education efforts throughout Oklahoma.

Technical assistance efforts were provided on-site to family members and professionals in all partnership sites. Technical assistance gave school personnel the one-on-one that they needed to work with individual students. Technical assistance was the most widely requested ongoing grant activity. Technical assistance included phone consultations, providing materials, one-on-one and group activities, and assisting in the classroom for specific students. A technical assistance guide was developed and distributed to partnership districts to enable teachers to mentor other teachers in supporting inclusive educational practices. Partnership districts were encouraged to identify new training and programmatic issues so that project staff could continue adjusting support strategies and improving training materials. Partnership districts kept site technical assistance logs so that technical assistance plans could be addressed over time and revisions made as needed.

Technical assistance activities were also provided to over 80 school districts which were not partnership districts. These activities included working with special and regular education teachers, assisting in IEP meetings, working in the classroom with specific students, observations and recommendations, and assisting parents in understanding IEP goals and objectives. Refinement of the technical assistance process continued to be an ongoing process throughout the grant to meet the needs of individual school districts. Family members and professionals from partnership districts assisted project staff with technical assistance activities when appropriate.

Objective 4.4:

> Build capacity at state, regional, and local levels to expand and maintain training and technical assistance activities through the use of a peer-to-peer approach.

Through workshop activities, project staff and other participants identified the objective, rationale, outcomes, network components, and outreach activities for the

Oklahoma Partners Network (OPN). A plan was developed to initiate a statewide infrastructure through OSDE programs including the grant, CSPD, SoonerStart, Oklahoma Transition Grant, and the Regional Education Service Centers. This infrastructure enabled educators and families to support each other as partners in the delivery of effective educational services. The components of the network consisted of an advisory group, management team, and three initiative or work teams (early intervention, least restrictive environment, and transition services). Outreach activities included training, technical assistance, referral and linkage, and products. Oklahoma Partners Points were products produced to provide information on issues concerning effective educational practices for students with severe disabilities and their families. The Network was designed as a mechanism to share effective practices and strategies, training, technical assistance, and mentoring throughout Oklahoma.

OPN members were identified through partnership districts in the initial stages of the network. As project staff worked with other districts, other partners were identified. A process was developed for individuals other than project staff to identify prospective partners through a referral system. A directory of partners members was available to parents and professionals wanting peer-to-peer support.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:

Many of the problems encountered had to do with attitude and willingness to change. Many times we heard, *"We've always done it this way,"* or *"I didn't get a degree to teach those children."* Attitudes were difficult, but not impossible to work with. Often we spent a lot of time preparing parents, teachers and administrators to understand IDEA and inclusive educational practices. A lot of discussion concerning inclusive practices occurred at initial trainings for partnership districts. This discussion was followed with videos, vignettes, and other examples of success stories. The Family Outreach Specialist played an important role by discussing her children and their inclusive experiences and positive outcomes. School personnel and parents wanted to hear first-hand how inclusive practices would benefit students with and without disabilities.

Change, or doing things differently, was also a challenge that was presented by school personnel. We worked with partnership districts teams through Leadership for Change to help them understand the change process and their part in that process. Many times the more resistant regular education teachers became big supporters of inclusive practices after they experienced a student with severe disabilities in their classroom. Teachers needed to see how students with severe disabilities could interact with their peers and how they could make progress toward IEP goals in the regular classroom. With supports, training, and a lot of collaboration, regular education teachers became less resistant and more supportive of inclusive practices.

Another problem that often occurred had to do with the teaming process. A lot of training occurred in developing the teams and assisting them to work together collaboratively. An issue for teams was time for meeting together. Each district had to determine a time schedule that worked for them, and this often required scheduling changes and before or after school commitment. Another issue in the teaming process was for district teams to develop a shared vision for including students with severe disabilities. This vision often was the same or similar to their already established school vision, but we required them to go through the process of developing a vision to understand how students with disabilities fit into their school system and to ensure buy-in from all participants. The vision that was developed would be used during training activities, technical assistance, and parent meetings to refresh memories and to

keep people united in their efforts to include students with severe disabilities where appropriate.

Another problem concerned linking districts with other districts who were providing effective inclusive education practices for students with severe disabilities. This problem lessened as the grant continued and more partnership sites were developed. The problem that remained was the distance that school personnel had to travel to observe inclusive practices. Project staff worked with the four Regional CSPD Action Teams to identify inclusive practices within classrooms or building sites within each region. This enabled districts to have places for on-site visits or phone contacts that were closer in proximity. On-site visits and peer support were a very important aspect to spreading effective inclusionary practices across the entire state.

LESSONS LEARNED:

There were several lessons that were learned during implementation of the Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project. One of those lessons is that to truly make systemic change within a school district, there has to be administrative leadership, support, and commitment to providing inclusive educational opportunities for children with severe disabilities. Leadership is truly important, because often the administrators set the tone for their employees' participation. We required principals to be on the building level teams and this was very important for faculty, parents, and related service providers to see their active involvement. Superintendents had to be supportive in order to ensure that inclusive practices would be part of the overall school climate and not just in a few classrooms. There would often be a shifting of role responsibility between teachers as students spent less time in special education classrooms and more time in regular education classrooms. This required administrative support at the building and district levels. Also, administrative support is essential in scheduling staff to participate in workshops, trainings, building level and districtwide team meetings, and observations of other districts.

Along with administrative support, we learned that building level and districtwide teams are critical to systemic change for the district. Building level teams served to assist individual teachers and students to understand and implement effective inclusive educational practices, but the districtwide teams were able to impact policy within a school district. Districtwide teams gathered information from building level teams and families to ensure that effective practices were identified and implemented throughout the district. In nonpartnership districts, pockets of change occurred through trainings and technical assistance, but these changes were usually child specific and not readily available to other children with disabilities.

We also learned that districts often needed assistance in effectively including students who had disabilities, but were not categorized severe. Although our main focus was for students with severe disabilities, we quickly learned that districts needed assistance to effectively include other students with mild and moderate disabilities. We helped districts to understand that the strategies used to include students with severe disabilities could also be used for students with mild and moderate disabilities. We

provided training opportunities that stressed modifications, adaptations, and inclusive practices that could benefit all students with disabilities regardless of the category or severity of their disabilities.

Another lesson that we learned is to have an array of activities to offer districts in order to meet their unique needs. Some districts needed everything from awareness level presentations to assistance in writing IEP goals. Other districts needed technical assistance in individual classrooms or information on adaptations and modifications. Every district was at a different level concerning implementing inclusive educational practices for their students with severe disabilities. Through their building and district level teams, districts had tremendous input into what trainings, technical assistance, and supports they received from project staff. A variety of books, videos, training and process guides, and other materials were distributed to partnership districts to assist in implementing effective inclusive practices for all students.

We also learned the importance of communication. Our trainings were designed to help individuals learn to communicate in a team situation. It was important to understand how special educators and regular classroom teachers communicated with each other, and how administrators communicated their support and leadership to their staff. It was also important to know how parents and educators communicated with each other. Probably the most important aspect concerning communication revolved around communication between the student and peers, family members, and teachers.

During the final months of the project, the partnership districts were surveyed to determine what aspects of their participation in the project were most beneficial in assisting them to provide inclusive educational opportunities for their students with severe disabilities. Districts were asked to identify their top three choices (with a rating of 1 as the most important) from the following: staff development, technical assistance, inservice training, resource materials, support at IEP meetings, parent meetings, other site observations/trainings, and other.

The following is a breakdown of responses:

Staff Development:

Two rated this #1; four rated this #2; and four rated this #3.

Technical Assistance:

Seven rated this #2 and four rated this #3.

Inservice Training:

Four rated this #1 and two rated this #3.

Resource material:

Two rated this #1; six rated this #2; and five rated this #3.

Support at IEP Meetings:

Four rated this #2 and two rated this #3.

Parent Meetings:

Two rated this #2 and three rated this #3.

Other Site Observations/Trainings:

Five rated this #1 and four rated this #2.

Other (Specify):

No responses

Technical assistance was the number one area that schools felt was beneficial to improving their inclusive educational programs. Inservice training and support at IEP meetings were next on the list of top three areas as identified by partnership districts.

We also asked partnership districts to list their top three needs to continue to improve inclusive educational practices for their students with severe disabilities. The list was the same as in the earlier question, and again they were asked to rank their top three choices with 1 as the most important. The following is a breakdown of those results:

Staff Development:

Ten rated this #1 and five rated this #2.

Technical Assistance:

Four rated this #1; eight rated this #2; and nine rated this #3.

Inservice Trainings:

Three rated this #2 and four rated this #3.

Resources/Materials:

Six rated this #1; four rated this #2; and seven rated this #3.

Support at IEP Meetings:

No responses

Parent Meetings:

No responses

Other (Specify):

No responses

This part of the survey indicated that staff development was the most important aspect of continuing support which districts felt that they needed. Technical assistance and resources/materials were the next items identified on the list of top three choices. These results identify the kind of supports which partnership districts need to continue implementing inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy changes have occurred at the national level that provided positive effects for inclusive educational practices for students with severe disabilities. Those changes include: the role of regular education teachers in IEP teams; supports and services for teachers in the classroom to effectively implement the IEP; and assistive technology, communication, and behavior needs addressed on the IEP.

Practices that have impacted children with severe disabilities include billing for reimbursement of eligible services to Medicaid by school districts and an increase in coordinated delivery of services by other agencies in school settings. These practices have helped keep students with their families while attending neighborhood schools or other community settings in the least restrictive environment.

Research is needed at the national and state level regarding the impact of least restrictive environment from the perspectives of school administrators, regular education teachers, special education teachers, parents, and nondisabled classmates.

The following issues could be included in national and state studies:

Least Restrictive Environment

How are attitudes about least restrictive environment changing ?
What are the factors that influence these changes?
What are the trends in least restrictive environment placements based on state and national data?
How does least restrictive environment impact student IEP goal achievement?

Alternate Assessment

What will be the impact of alternate assessment policies and practices?
What kinds of supports do school districts need to implement alternate assessment for their students with severe disabilities?

Funding

What is the impact of funding for professional development and training at preservice and inservice levels on practice, least restrictive environment placement statistics, and progress towards results/achievement of students with severe disabilities.

DISTRIBUTION OF REPORT:

Copies of this final report were distributed to the following organizations:

1. United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Grants and Contracts Services Team
2. Educational Resources and Information Clearinghouse (ERIC)
3. Oklahoma State Department of Education
4. University Affiliated Program of Oklahoma and College of Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center
5. Oklahoma Commission on Children & Youth
6. Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
7. Parents Reaching Out (PRO) in Oklahoma
8. Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Map #1

Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project
Partnership Sites

20 - *Partnership Sites

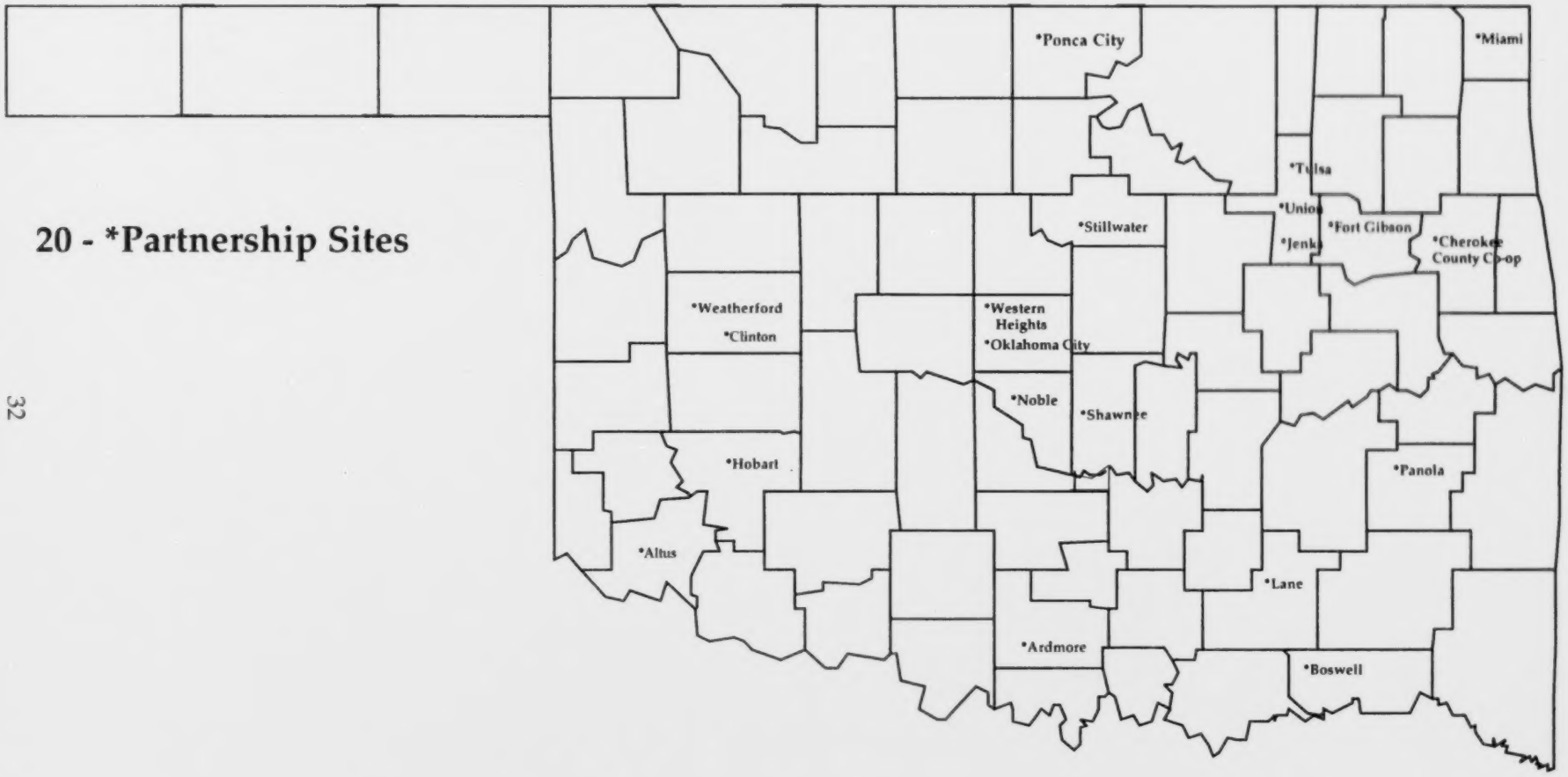


Table I

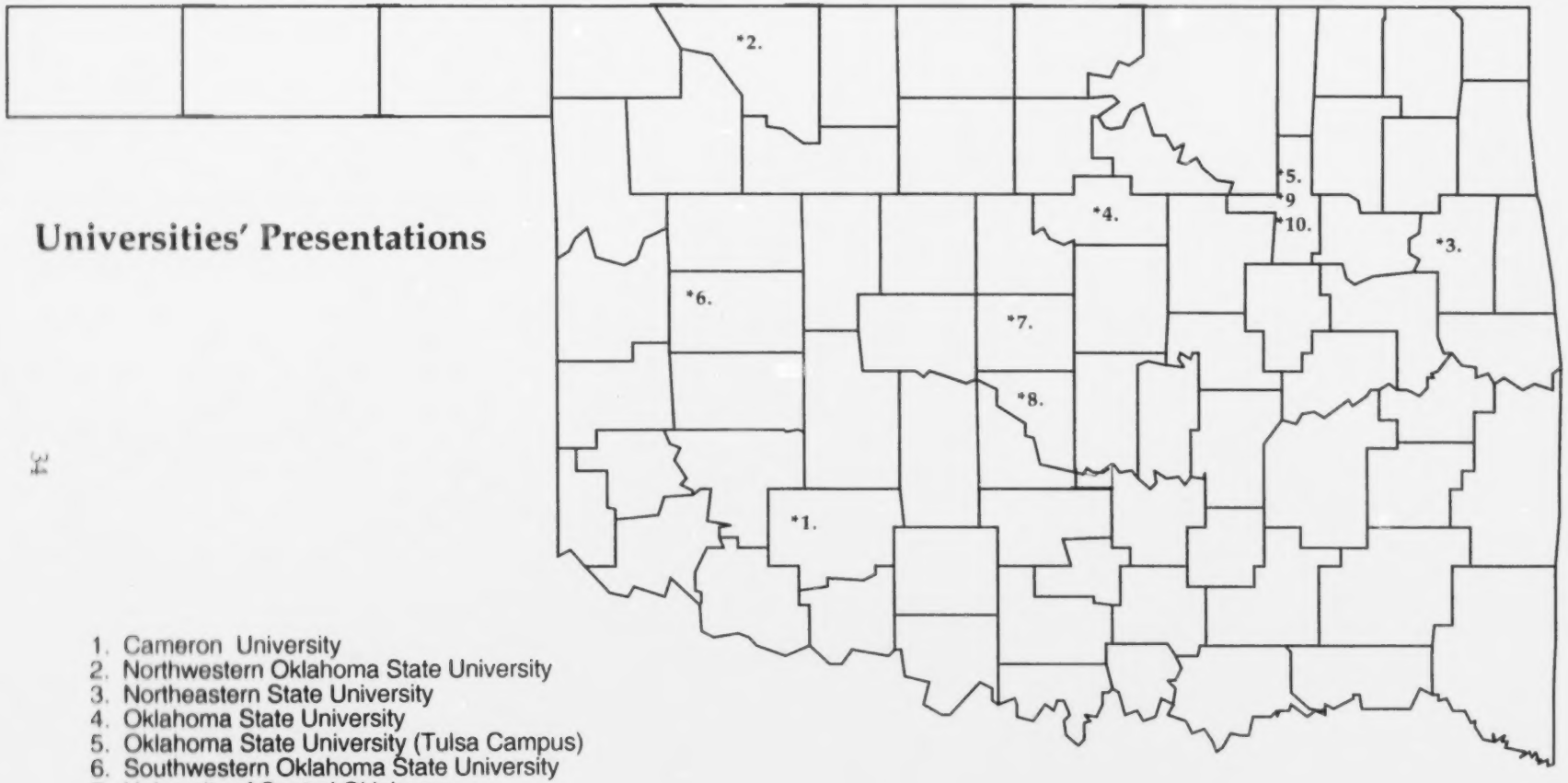
Oklahoma Statewide System Change Project
Partnership District Demographics

Total	Population	Total Student Enrollment	Number Students with Severe Disabilities
Altus	24,000	4,650	17
Clinton	115,000	1,950	8
Hobart	4,300	930	15
Miami	13,071	2,430	17
Oklahoma City	444,719	38,333	748
Panola	Rural Independent School with District; No City	340	13
Weatherford	11,000	2,303	10
Western Heights	Independent School District within OK City limits	2,871	24
Fort Gibson	2,243	1,800	17
Noble	5,010	2,628	16
Jenks	8,332	853	47
Ponca City	26,300	5,730	25
Union	Independent School District within Broken Arrow City limits	10,631	52
Ardmore	31,000	3,117	26
Shawnee	30,000	4,000	113
Tulsa	753,750	41,253	1,574
Lane	Independent School District (600)	190	9
Boswell	750	450	8
Stillwater	40,000	5,396	29
*Cherokee Cooperative			12

*Cherokee Cooperative 10 Districts (Briggs, Grandview, Hulbert, Keys, Lowrey, Norwood, Peggs, Shady Grove, Tenkiller, Woodall)

Map #2

Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project

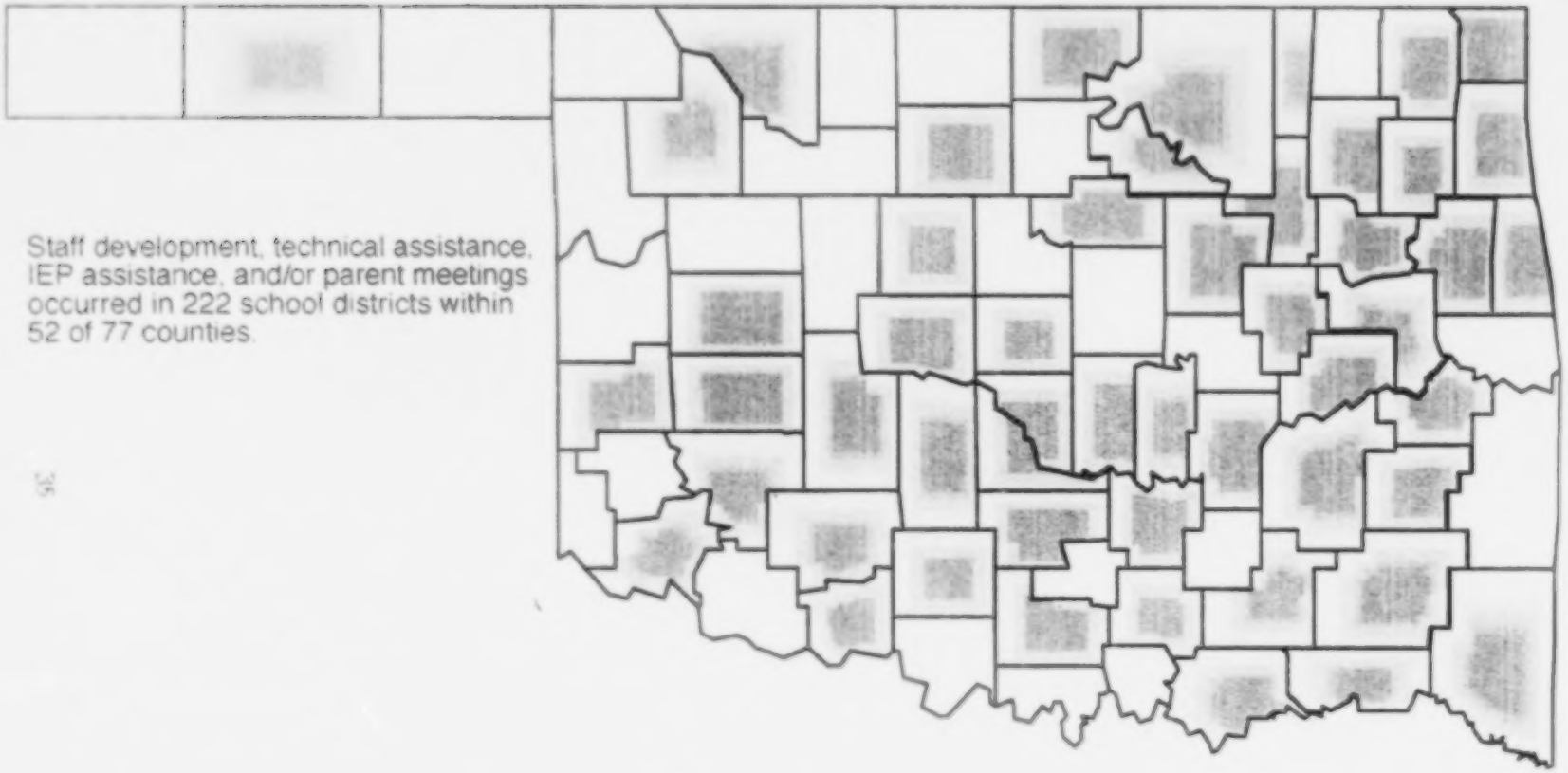


Universities' Presentations

1. Cameron University
2. Northwestern Oklahoma State University
3. Northeastern State University
4. Oklahoma State University
5. Oklahoma State University (Tulsa Campus)
6. Southwestern Oklahoma State University
7. University of Central Oklahoma
8. University of Oklahoma
9. The University of Tulsa
10. Oral Roberts University

Map #3

Oklahoma Statewide Systems Change Project



Staff development, technical assistance, IEP assistance, and/or parent meetings occurred in 222 school districts within 52 of 77 counties.

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